



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
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WEST WARWICK'S CENTREVILLE MILL LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER

An 1861 West Warwick textile mill has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture and industry. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Centreville Mill to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Centreville Mill is a well-preserved mill that is important in the industrial history and architecture of West Warwick and the Pawtuxet River valley, one of Rhode Island's most heavily industrialized areas.

The Centreville Mill is located at 3 Bridal Avenue in the village of Centreville in southern West Warwick. The 12.7-acre parcel is located on both sides of the south branch of the Pawtuxet River, a heavily industrialized waterway that supplied power and water to numerous industrial enterprises along its route from its headwaters in the Flat River Reservoir in Coventry to its confluence with the North Branch at the village of Riverpoint, and to Pontiac Mills in Warwick. The property includes the Mill, the Dam, Headgate, Headrace, and Tailrace.

The property is dominated by the Mill, which consists of six attached single- and multi-story buildings erected between 1861 and 1909. All of the buildings share common construction materials

and architectural features used in the design of the earliest building by local mill builder Horace Foster, and continued through the last phase of construction completed under B.B. & R. Knight Co. in 1909. The massive walls are built of rubblestone granite and shale with mortar parging. The Mill interior has a fire-resistive interior structure with heavy post-and-beam framing and multiple layer wood plank floors. Windows have granite lintels and sills and original wood sash with some replacement units

The Dam (1885) is a 150-foot-long, masonry structure with a concave curve and massive granite block abutments. It holds back the waters of the Pawtuxet River to form the 14-acre Centerville Mill Pond. Located 15 feet upstream from the Dam, the Headgate (1881) is a rectangular granite wall containing four large apertures that were operated to regulate the flow of water into the raceway. The Headrace (1871) is a 30-foot-wide, 175-foot-long granite-lined trench that channels water from the pond to the Mill's power turbines, and the Tailrace (1871) is a similar trench that carries water from the Mill to rejoin the Pawtuxet River.

The first mill building on the site was erected in 1807 for the Warwick Manufacturing Company. By 1821, the Green Mill (now demolished) was producing wool and cotton fabrics. Benedict Lapham acquired the property in 1852 and over the next two decades, he and his brother Enos Lapham made major investments in what became known as the Centerville Mill. Improvements included erecting three large stone mill buildings, relocating the Green Mill and converting it to a storehouse, creating a new Headrace and Tailrace, and working on the Dam. By the 1870s, the expanded mill contained 31,000 spindles, 700 broad looms, and employed about 350 operatives to produce about 9 million yards of cotton cloth annually.

In 1903, Robert B. Treat (grandson of Benedict Lapham) sold the property to the B.B. & R. Knight Company, one of the largest textile manufacturers in the world, known for their trademark "Fruit of the Loom" fabric. Knight dedicated Centerville Mill to weaving buckram, a

stiff, heavily sized cotton or linen fabric used for garment linings, book covers, and construction. Between 1906 and 1909, B.B. & R. Knight increased production fourfold, and added three more buildings to the mill complex.

As the industry began to decline, B.B. & R. Knight sold all of their New England textile mills to the Consolidated Textile Co. of New York in 1920 for \$20 million. Centreville Mill closed in the wake of the Great Depression. The building subsequently hosted several independent textile concerns. Tenants included the Bay Mill Company; Gaunt Worsted Mills, Inc.; Mount Hope Plush Co.; Elastic Fabrics, Inc.; and Standard Garment Co. Centreville Mill now contains several commercial and light industrial concerns, including a lace-making operation.

The National Register nomination for Centreville Mill was prepared by Matthew Kierstead and Illeana Matos of PAL. According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC, “For over a century, Centreville Mill was a vital part of the industrial way-of-life along the Pawtuxet River. Today this and other historic mills in West Warwick offer valuable opportunities for new economic development, housing, and renewed appreciation for the community’s heritage.”

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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